

American people and reclaim America's global leadership on Russia policy. While he has repeatedly failed to do so, yet another opportunity lies before him this week at the G20 summit in Buenos Aires, where he is scheduled to meet with Putin. If ever there were a time for this President to defend our country, our principles, and those of our allies, this would be it. If ever there were an opportunity for American leadership, this would be it. If there were ever a time for President Trump to find his spine on Russia, this would be it.

In the meantime, President Trump must use this week's opportunity in Buenos Aires to send a clear message to Putin that we will not tolerate its increasingly aggressive behavior in Ukraine. Here is what I believe the President must do:

First, the United States needs to increase assistance to our friends in Ukraine in the face of continued aggression in Donbass and now in the Kerch Strait. The Trump administration must immediately increase security assistance to Ukraine, including the provision of lethal maritime equipment and weapons. In addition, we must bolster intelligence-sharing with Kiev and assist Ukraine's efforts to improve its maritime domain awareness.

Second, NATO has a critical role and should consider increasing exercises and its presence in the Black Sea. The United States has maintained an active presence in the South China Sea to protect shipping lanes. NATO should move quickly to establish such a presence in the Black Sea.

Third, the United States should increase sanctions pressure on Russia immediately. This is long overdue. The President is required to impose sanctions on Russia under the CAATSA law. Several mandatory provisions of the law remain ignored. I would offer that now would be a good time to follow the law. But imposing sanctions alone does not constitute a real strategy.

Fourth, Sunday's events present an important opportunity for American engagement with like-minded allies across Europe. Now is the time for serious diplomacy and coalition-building in the face of this threat. Our European friends spoke out in full opposition to Russia's attack on Sunday. Now let's see if we can work together to turn words into action and deter such Kremlin attacks in the future.

Finally, as the situation in Ukraine grows more perilous, we in the Senate must also live up to our national security responsibilities. Following the President's failures in Helsinki, Senator GRAHAM and I, along with others, introduced the Defending American Security from Kremlin Aggression Act, known as DASKAA. This legislation is more than another sanctions bill; it charts a comprehensive way forward for how the United States can better defend its interests and those of our close allies against Putin's unrelenting

assault on our values, security, economic interests, and the rules-based international order.

After months of Senate hearings on the legislation, we have nothing to show for it, as both the Senate Foreign Relations and Banking Committees have refused to mark up new legislation to respond to the Kremlin threat. What are we waiting for? What are we waiting for? The alarm bells are ringing. Yet the Senate Republican leadership is sound asleep. They are asleep as Trump concedes more ground to the Kremlin in Ukraine and cyber space; asleep while Russian ships ram Ukrainian vessels in international waters and injure brave Ukrainian sailors; asleep while Vladimir Putin pounds away at our points of vulnerability.

The American people deserve a vote on DASKAA before we leave for the holidays. Anything less would be a mark of shameful abdication of our responsibility to protect and defend our national interests.

I hope this Chamber will wake up to this growing threat. Perhaps Sunday's attack will be a ringing alarm clock that compels this body and the international community to act.

Finally, the American people cannot afford a weak performance by President Trump at the G20 summit, like we saw in Helsinki—cannot afford such a performance.

President Trump, this is your opportunity to finally show American leadership in defense of our principles and our close allies across Europe.

The time is now. It is critical. We are waiting to see that in fact the President can rise to the moment.

RUSSIA INVESTIGATION

Finally, on another matter, I want to address breaking news of the day on a related matter. Yesterday, we learned from an exclusive report in the Guardian that former Trump campaign chairman Paul Manafort repeatedly held secret talks with WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange within the Ecuadorian Embassy in London. These revelations reported publicly in the Guardian, if true, raise serious, new questions about the Trump campaign's possible relationship with WikiLeaks, including the timed release of hacked emails orchestrated to inflict maximum damage on Hillary Clinton's 2016 Presidential campaign.

According to the published report, Manafort visited in 2015 and then again in the spring of 2016—just in time for Trump to name him the RNC convention manager. Sources in Ecuador say Manafort's meetings with Assange may have been purposefully kept off the Embassy's official visitor log. It is essential that Ecuador's current government publicly and swiftly confirm whether former Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa and his administration allowed these meetings to take place.

Given that Secretary Pompeo met with Ecuadorian Foreign Minister Valencia yesterday morning—the day before this report came out—the State

Department and the intelligence community must immediately brief the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Mr. Manafort's interaction with Mr. Assange, as well as the Ecuadorian Government's role in any meetings. This is critical for us to know, and I hope it won't take other actions to get clarity.

I am already concerned that tomorrow we are having an all-Members briefing on what happened with Saudi Arabia and the murder of Mr. Khashoggi, and there won't be anybody from the intelligence community there. Where is Gina Haspel, the head of the CIA? She went and listened to the tapes. Her Agency is reported to have come up with conclusions that said, yes, the Crown Prince knew and was involved, yet we are going to have a briefing without anybody from the intelligence community. It is an affront to the Senate, which has responsibilities—oversight and otherwise—to understand what is the appropriate action of this body as it relates to U.S. foreign policy and this particular ally. But we are not going to have anybody from the intelligence community. To me, that is the ultimate coverup.

So I want to know what happened and whether this Guardian report is true. I want to know from the intelligence community what their determination is. I don't want to hear it characterized by someone else; I want to hear it directly from them. Only then can we actually act in a way that is both concerted and with the knowledge necessary to make informed decisions on critical U.S. foreign policy.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session for a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

WITHDRAWAL OF NOMINATION HOLDS

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, the Finance Committee has worked with the Treasury Department to ensure proper responsiveness to committee inquiries. We are continuing to review these matters to determine what further oversight is required.

Mr. WYDEN. I thank the chairman for his willingness to work with me on this important matter. I know we believe that further oversight needs to be done; however, at this point, the Treasury Department has been sufficiently cooperative. Accordingly, I am lifting my hold on Treasury Department nominees.

CONFIRMATION OF STEPHEN ALEXANDER VADEN

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. President, President Trump nominated Stephen Vaden to be General Counsel for the Department of Agriculture. In that role, Mr. Vaden will oversee all of the legal services for all operations and programs of the Department and 250 attorneys nationwide.

Most of Mr. Vaden's experience is not in agriculture or natural resources issues. Much of his work at the law firm Jones Day focused on election law, and during the 2016 election cycle, he coauthored amicus briefs in States where State legislatures had enacted discriminatory voting laws designed to suppress minority votes following the Supreme Court ruling in *Shelby County v. Holder* which gutted the Voting Rights Act of 1965. State legislatures in North Carolina, Ohio, and Virginia took full advantage of the *Shelby County* ruling that removed previous preclearance requirements.

In North Carolina, the legislature passed a law changing various State voting procedures. The legislature utilized racial data on voting practices in drafting the law, and where they saw voting practices that were predominately utilized by African American voters, they changed those voting practices.

Mr. Vaden was one of three attorneys who submitted an amicus brief in support of the State of North Carolina, for Senators Tillis, Graham, Cruz, Lee, and the Judicial Education Project. The Jones Day amicus brief argued that "North Carolina's race-neutral regulations of the time, place, and manner of its elections do not violate Section 2 [Of the Voting Rights Act]." They further wrote, "Quite to the contrary, North Carolina allows all citizens to vote. Although members of minority races may disproportionately choose, for socio-economic or other reasons, not to take advantage of this equal opportunity, North Carolina's practices are not the proximate cause of this phenomenon."

In its published opinion, the U.S. Court of Appeals strongly disagreed with that argument and found that the North Carolina State election law "targeted African Americans with almost surgical precision." The court further stated, "We cannot ignore the evidence that, because of race, the legislature enacted one of the largest restrictions of the franchise in modern North Carolina history," and "Faced with this record, we can only conclude that the North Carolina General Assembly en-

acted the challenged provisions with discriminatory intent."

At the November 9, 2017, Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry hearing to consider Mr. Vaden's nomination, I questioned him about his role in the amicus brief in the North Carolina voting rights case. I am a firm believer in the right to vote and deeply troubled by the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals findings that the North Carolina case involved voter discrimination.

I did not find Mr. Vaden's answers to my questions to be sufficient. When I asked him if the Judicial Education Project paid Jones Day in full for their work on the North Carolina case, he simply said, "As an associate I did not have access, nor did I participate in the billing function of the firm." I find this answer insufficient.

Also, I noted in my questions to Mr. Vaden that, in my experience as having been an associate at a law firm, if an associate indicated to a partner that they did not want to participate in a case, the firm would certainly defer to their wishes. When I asked Mr. Vaden if he expressed any concern with participating in the voting rights cases to his partners at Jones Day, he replied that he did not.

I also note Mr. Vaden's lack of experience in the area of agriculture. Prior to joining USDA last January, Mr. Vaden had no particular involvement in any agriculture-specific issues or any agriculture-specific clients during his tenure at Jones Day. His nomination is a significant departure by the Trump administration from the background and experience of previous USDA General Counsel nominees, Republican or Democrat. For example, during the Obama administration, Jeff Prieto was a longtime attorney at the Justice Department's Environment and Natural Resources Division before becoming USDA General Counsel. His predecessor, Ramona Romero, was an attorney with a major U.S. agribusiness company involved in a wide range of agricultural policy and legal issues. Going back to the administration of George W. Bush, Nancy Bryson was a long-time environment and natural resources attorney both at the Justice Department and in private practice.

I am also troubled to learn that the American Federation of Government Employees, AFGE, came out in opposition to Mr. Vaden's nomination, citing that one of Mr. Vaden's first official acts at USDA was to terminate the labor contract between the office and its staff of 250 lawyers and legal professionals nationwide. In their statement, the AFGE stated that, due to his lack of collaboration and partnership with Office of General Counsel workers, they believe he will "continue creating an agency culture that results in even more unprecedented levels of poor worker morale, with the potential to negatively impact the quality of services provided to virtually all Americans."

For these reasons, I opposed Stephen Vaden's nomination for General Counsel of the Department of Agriculture.

NOMINATION OF JUSTIN MUZINICH AND NOMINATION OF MICHAEL FAULKENDER

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, today I am lifting my holds on the nominations of Justin Muzinich, to be Deputy Secretary of the Treasury and Michael Faulkender to be Assistant Secretary of the Treasury for Economic Policy, both of which were reported favorably from the Finance Committee. I had placed holds on these nominations until the Treasury Department agreed to provide the Senate Finance Committee with certain information I had requested in connection with the committee's oversight of the Treasury Department.

Working with Chairman HATCH, I reached an agreement under which the Treasury Department has cooperated with the Finance Committee on a number of my requests.

For these reasons, I will no longer object to any unanimous consent request concerning the nominations of Mr. Muzinich and Mr. Faulkender.

COAST GUARD REAUTHORIZATION BILL

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, this evening the House of Representatives concurred in the Senate amendment to the House amendment to S. 140, legislation known as the Frank LoBiondo Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2018. The House's action clears the way for this measure to reach the President's desk. As the Coast Guard works through hurricane season and continues drug interdiction and other critical efforts, House passage of this legislation is a critical step toward supporting the men and women in uniform who guard our Nation. Among this bill's provisions is a title that addresses the need for clear and enforceable standards of incidental water discharges from vessels. Senator CARPER and I reached a bipartisan agreement, included in this legislation, which places the Environmental Protection Agency in the lead role of establishing standards, which the Coast Guard will monitor and enforce. Clear, achievable rules will be the most effective way to address environmental concerns about the spread of invasive species through ballast water discharges. I am pleased to have reached this agreement, and I want to inform my colleagues that we will be submitting errata to the Committee Report on the Coast Guard Authorization Act of 2018 Senate Report 115-89, that reflects the agreement we reached. I ask the Senator from Delaware if the Senator agrees that the modifications we negotiated over the last few months have made a significant improvement to the legislation?

Mr. CARPER. I thank the Senator from South Dakota. I do agree. Today, we are one step closer to getting this